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ABSTRACT

To provide classroom teachers with an understanding of some of the properties of language and of their effects on classroom interaction, this booklet reviews research in the area and offers teaching suggestions based upon that research. The first section of the booklet presents an overview of the American idea of language "correctness" and its origins and discusses the problems of trying to define "good usage." The second section examines how teachers influence children's learning of language through their own usage, their leadership patterns, their feedback, and their expectations. The third section deals with language acquisition, examining in turn the phonology, syntax, semantics, and social usage of language. The fourth section examines some of the teacher attitudes that foster students' linguistic development and outlines several activities that can be used to enhance language acquisition. The final section discusses ways that teachers can help older students develop skilled use of language and reviews the debate over nonstandard speech. (FL)

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Language Skills in the Classroom

by Pamela Cooper
Lea Stewart

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a part of every speaking situation. Since classroom interaction is a vitally important speaking situation for students, language should be an area of concern and study for all who are interested in education. Teachers who are interested in gaining an understanding of language, however, will be confronted by a somewhat bewildering array of material. For many years, language as an area of study has fascinated humanists, scientists, and social scientists. Studies range from minute investigations of the acoustical properties of speech to the social implications of the talk of street gangs. A detailed summary of all the research would be impossible to compile. This publication therefore presents an overview of a small portion of the vast literature in order to provide classroom teachers with an understanding of some of the properties of language and of their effects on classroom interaction.

THE AMERICAN IDEA OF CORRECTNESS

Most Americans believe that language can be used "correctly" or "incorrectly." This notion of "correctness," however, is a myth. Language is dynamic and ever-changing; as a result, there are no permanent or absolute standards. During the course of the development of the English language, there have been changes in the meaning of words, gramatical structure, and even pronunciation of vowel sounds. Many of these changes continue today. To chart these changes, linguists study language as it is used by speakers and describe the nature and function of language. They study what is said; they do not prescribe what should or should not be said.

As members of our society, teachers naturally are influenced by the prevailing idea of correctness. Working from this assumption, teachers may tell students that their use of language is wrong. For example, a teacher may tell a student who says *He be going to the store* that this statement is incorrect usage. This teacher is using a prescriptive approach to language. A problem occurs when the teacher tells a student that his or her usage is wrong but the student knows that this usage functions well outside the classroom. The student faces a dilemma. The student is able to communicate in his or her daily social life, yet the teacher says this comunication is wrong. At this point, the student may shut out the teacher and continue to speak in the way that functions in daily life. And the teacher may wonder why the student will not learn.

Problems like this can be avoided if teachers focus on helping students improve their language skill and not their language "correctness." Instead of striving for correct usage, teachers need to help students develop language which is clearer or more appropriate for a particular situation. Language which is appropriate for a student in the street may not be functional in the classroom or in society at large. Teachers can help students of all ages develop the ability to recognize these differences.

This section presents a brief overview of the American idea of correctness and its origins. To best serve students, teachers need to replace this emphasis on correctness with an emphasis on skill.

Description

Several research studies support the conclusion that in general Americans believe in an absolute standard of correctness. Rosenthal found that many preschool children have a remarkably consistent notion of what is "correct" and "not correct" in language (50).* Shuy reports that as students start junior high school (if not earlier) they are confronted with statements about the importance of learning standard English if they are ever to make something of their lives (54).

To sample adults' notions about language, Shuy asked 16 Washington, D.C., employers to evaluate 16 samples of speech (54). The reactions of the employers: (1) there is *one* best form of English which should be spoken at all times, (2) a person's language use reflects his or her logic and intelligence, (3) nonstandard speech should be eradicated, and (4) making mistakes is always bad.

Many Americans believe that "ordinary speech" is basically careless and that people should be more careful in their use of language. For example, most speakers admit that they "should" use expressions such as *the slot in which it goes* instead of *the slot it goes in*, yet they do not do so in practice (57). Most people seem to think they should observe "the rules of grammar" more conscientiously than they do (48). Many Americans believe that "good English . . . [is] an ideal towards which all strive but . . . no one attains" (5, p. 386). In 1960, Hall described an attitude which still persists today:

> Usually we are told and we believe that "correctness" is a characteristic of educated, intelligent people, whereas "incorrectness" is the special quality of uneducated, ignorant, or stupid people. (26, p. 11)

*Numbers in parentheses appearing in the text refer to the Bibliography beginning on page 30.

In an early observation, Bloomfield noted:

> Our unfortunate attitude toward matters of standard and nonstandard speech ("correct English") is largely kept up by our schools . . . . Fanciful dogmas as to what is "good English" are handed down by educational authorities and individual teachers who are utterly ignorant of what is involved . . . . Meanwhile the differences between standard[1] and prevalent nonstandard[2] forms (such as *I saw it: I seen it*) are made the subject not so much of rational drill as of preachment about "ignorance," "carelessness," and "bad associations." (8, p. 500)

Although Bloomfield's condemnations are especially strong, many of his conclusions are supported by current research, such as Shuy's study described previously. Some teachers "continue to believe that 'correctness' is somehow built into words, [and] is . . . determined by laws of language" (2, p. 167). The idea that grammar is the art of speaking and writing English *correctly* has been one of the forces molding popular attitudes about language (22). Unfortunately, some educators foster this belief that there are "correct" and "incorrect" varieties of language (36).

Historical Background

While the idea of correctness developed in a historical context, a complete history of this attitude toward grammar is beyond the scope of this book. Therefore a brief history of some of the factors contributing to this popular point of view will be given.[3]

The latter years of the seventeenth century saw the beginning of the notion that grammar should be prescriptive. This attitude became prominent in the eighteenth century, continued throughout the nineteenth century, and remains popular today (48). Bloomfield claims that prescriptive grammarians appeared during the seventeenth century as many people rose into relatively privileged positions and had to change from nonstandard to standard speech to conduct their business affairs (8). These people were afraid to trust the speech forms of their parents and grandparents who spoke nonstandard English and were consequently quite willing to listen to the proclamations of "more educated" and knowledgeable "authorities."

American grammarians of the eighteenth century believed that language was of divine origin, perfect in its beginning. Since Latin was believed to have retained more of its original perfections than English, it was used as the model on which to base a grammar of English (20, 48). Thus, the early grammarians tried to describe English using the rules of Latin. Myers maintains that

> by insisting on rules which often had no foundation in the speech

> habits of the people, they [the eighteenth century grammarians] converted "grammar" into an artificial and generally distasteful subject . . . . [Thus] a good deal of what an . . . American learns under the name of grammar has nothing to do with the use of our language; and a good deal more is in direct conflict with the actual practices of most educated speakers. (44, p. 19)

The immediate source of today's commonly held ideas about grammar is the nineteenth century school grammars (20), which were based on written language usage, not on spoken language usage (46). Many of the nineteenth century "grammatical rules" remain in textbooks today. Bloomfield theorizes that "the doctrine of our grammarians has had very little effect in the way of banishing or establishing specific speech-forms, but it has set up among . . . [the public] the notion that forms which one has not heard may be 'better' than those which one actually hears and speaks" (8, p. 498).

The Attempt to Define "Good Usage"

As already noted, there is general agreement among speakers of English that "good English" should be acquired and that "the rules" should be followed; however, "we do not by any means agree as to what . . . good English is" (20, p. 2). According to Lloyd:

> In view of the general agreement among the literate that a "correct" standard exists, and in view of the vituperation directed at anyone suspected of corrupting it, one would expect some kind of agreement about what is correct. There is little to be found. (39, p. 280)

Several research studies support this conclusion. In an informal survey of high school and college teachers of English, authors, editors, journalists, radio commentators, lexicographers, and a random sampling of subscribers to a popular magazine, each participant was asked to underline the usage he or she disapproved of in a list of 19 "controversial grammatical expressions" (37). From the results of the survey, another writer concluded that the "distinguished electors seem individually to have played hop, skip and jump down the column, each finding . . . about ten he could approve of. If any two fell on the same ten, it was merely a coincidence" (39, p. 281).

A more recent study compared information from the *Linguistic Atlas of the United States* (a massive survey of the actual usage of the American people) with 312 usage books from grades 3 through 12 (41). The author reached six conclusions:

1. The *Linguistic Atlas* and the textbooks agreed on the received standard' (for example, cultured informants regularly use *sit* in sentences like *Sit down* and the textbooks supported this

usage) and disagreed on popular usage[5] (in large parts of the Atlantic Seaboard, according to the Atlas, *set* predominates in the speech of high school graduates and occurs with some frequency in the speech of college graduates; however, the textbooks claimed that using *set* in this instance was an example of a "troublesome" or "confusing" usage and should be avoided).[6]

2. The *Linguistic Atlas* showed an expanding usage[7] which conflicted with received standard (for example, *dove* as past tense of *dive* is a standard northern form expanding southward, but the textbooks either did not mention this occurrence or, in approximately half of them, *dove* was mentioned as never acceptable).
3. Textbook writers generally agreed with each other but disagreed with the *Linguistic Atlas* (for example, the *Atlas* noted the use of *he don't* in several areas of the country while the textbook writers condemned *he don't* as "nonstandard," "vulgar," or "illiterate").
4. There was an inverse correlation between the findings of the *Linguistic Atlas* and the textbooks (for example, the overwhelming majority of the *Atlas*'s informants in all areas say *it's me*, while most of the textbooks maintained that the nominative case must follow the verb *to be*.
5. The *Linguistic Atlas* revealed that standard usage[8] was divided between several variants of an expression (for example, in the sentence "The broom is behind the door," many informants use "in back of" or "back of" instead of "behind"), while the textbooks supported only one of the variants (in this case, "behind the door").
6. The *Linguistic Atlas* showed that standard usage agreed with the received standard which the textbooks supported, but also revealed that several nonstandard variants were common, and the textbooks warned readers to avoid several nonstandard variants which the *Atlas* showed are not even in common usage. (41)

The author concluded that "since the textbook writers as a group do not succeed in defining any consistent standard of 'correctness' . . . their basic premise that such a standard exists comes into question. If it [correctness] is an indefinable abstraction, it is of little practical value in teaching. Indeed, as we have seen, it can all too easily lead to contradictions and confusions" (41, p. 197).

Thus, there appears to be little agreement, even among writers of usage books, as to the nature of the "correct" grammatical standard. Nevertheless, among the American public, there still exists the general idea that, to be correct, language must be spoken according to rules presented in grammar handbooks and textbooks. Furthermore, textbook writers believe in an arbitrary standard of "correctness" that can and should be discovered and taught. Yet, authors, editors, and textbook writers do not agree on what this standard should be.

This lack of agreement is not surprising since absolute standards for language are difficult to find. Instead of focusing on the correctness of language usage, teachers need to tell their students that language usage can be more or less skillful. A skillful use of language is the ability to use language which is effective in a given situation. For example, language which is effective in a formal presentation may be inappropriate in an informal social situation. Language which is impressive in a job interview may seem out of place in a family discussion. Teachers of young children can begin to develop in their students the foundation for these skills. The following sections offer teachers some suggestions for beginning this important task.

LANGUAGE AS PART OF THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

A major premise of this book is that teachers can influence the development of children's language skills. Even when teachers are not directly engaged in teaching language skills, their own use of language, their leadership patterns, their feedback, and their expectations influence children's use of language. This section examines how teachers influence children's learning of language in these hidden ways.

Communication Axioms

It is generally agreed that teaching is communicating (16). For this reason, some axioms of communication will be briefly outlined.

1. We cannot not communicate. Too often teachers assume that when they are not talking, they are not communicating. However, nothing could be further from the truth. All behavior communicates — the arrangement of furniture in classrooms; clothing, movements, and gestures; the use of time in the classroom. (For a more comprehensive discussion of this axiom and all others included here, see Cooper [16]). In fact, it has been estimated that 65 percent of the meaning a person receives from a message is communicated through such nonverbal means (7).

2. Meanings are in people, not in words. The following example clearly demonstrates the confusion that can result from this axiom:

> Here the Red Queen began again. "Can you answer useful questions?" she said. "How is bread made?"
>
> "I know that!" Alice cried eagerly. "You take some flour —."
>
> "Where do you pick the flower?" the White Queen asked. "In a garden or in the hedges?"
>
> "Well, it isn't picked at all," Alice explained, "it's ground ———."

"How many acres of ground?" said the White Queen. "You musn't leave out so many things." (11)

Because words are symbolic and arbitrary, two people may or may not have the same meanings for them. It is imperative that teachers strive to make sure they are on the same meaning wave length with their students. If teacher and student do not understand each other's meanings, it is difficult for learning to occur.

3. Every message has two components — a content component and a relationship component. The content component is the information contained in the message; the information includes the form of the message as well as its meaning. In addition to the information it contains, any given message also indicates to the other person how we view our relationship with her/him. The importance of the relationship message to teachers is evident. When students have a positive relationship with teachers, learning is enhanced (23).

Modeling

One of the ways in which teachers affect children's acquisition of language skills is through modeling. The influence of modeling, however, is not great unless children interact with the models (59). Yet, in many classrooms, interaction is often lacking. Several researchers indicate that teachers do the majority of talking in a classroom, that students rarely do more than answer teacher questions (3, 6, 29).

Research indicates that when students interact with teachers, language skills are enhanced. Morrison (43) and Nelson (45) found that the percentage of teacher comments which made use of student opinions and ideas was positively related to test scores on language skills. Children's vocabulary growth was significantly greater under teachers rated by students as high on a warmth scale (13). Evidently, understanding, democratic, friendly teachers encourage confident and productive student participation (38, 52), which, in turn, enhances student language skills.

Feedback

When teachers give feedback to students, it is important that they follow the rules of effective feedback:

1. *Make feedback specific rather than general.* What *specifically* was ineffective (or effective)? What can the student do to eliminate the problem?
2. *Be sure feedback is well timed.* In general, the more immediate

the feedback, the better. In some situations, delayed feedback may be more effective than immediate feedback — for example, if a child is not ready to listen to it.

3. *Focus feedback on behavior, not on the individual.* When feedback focuses on behavior ("Perhaps you could rearrange the blocks so that all the red ones are together.) rather than on the individual ("I don't know why you can't ever listen to directions."), children feel less threatened and more willing to try new ideas. If these rules are followed, students will be more willing to communicate — to try out their language skills.

Teacher Expectations

Rosenthal and Jacobson outlined the process of teacher expectancy as follows:

1. Teachers expect certain behaviors from certain students.
2. These expectations influence the teacher's behavior toward these students.
3. The teacher's behavior indicates to the students what the teacher expects of them. These expectations affect the student's self-concept, motivation to achieve, and achievement.
4. If the teacher's behavior is consistent over time and the student does not resist it, high-expectation students will achieve well and low-expectation students will not. (51)

Although much disagreement has been generated over the teacher expectancy issue, the evidence suggests that teacher expectations can be self-fulfilling (24, 55). If teachers expect children to do well academically, they will. The same principle applies to students whom teachers expect to do poorly.

Teachers can communicate these expectations in several ways to low- and high-achieving students:

1. *Waiting less time for lows to answer.* Teachers provide more time for highs to respond than for lows.
2. *Staying with lows in failure situations.* Teachers respond to lows' (more so than highs') incorrect answers by giving them the answer or calling on another student to answer the question. Teachers are more likely to repeat the question, provide a clue, or ask highs a new question in failure situations.
3. *Rewarding inappropriate behavior of lows.* Teachers in some cases praise marginal or inaccurate responses of lows. Praising inappropriate substantive responses (rather than perseverance) when the children's peers know the answer may only emphasize the academic weakness of these students.
4. *Criticizing lows more frequently than highs.* Some teachers criticize lows *proportionately* more frequently than highs for wrong answers.
5. *Praising lows less frequently than highs.* Lows are less likely

to be praised than highs for correct answers, even though they provide fewer correct answers. In certain classes, if lows respond, they are more likely to be criticized and less likely to be praised; thus, the safest strategy is to remain silent, because then the teacher is apt to call on another student.

6. *Not giving feedback to public responses of lows.* Teachers respond to lows' answers (especially correct answers) by calling on another student to respond. Lack of feedback seems undesirable because these students may be less sure than others about the adequacy of their responses.
7. *Paying less attention to lows.* Teachers attend more closely to highs. Some data suggests that teachers smile more often and maintain greater eye contact with high than lows, and also miss many opportunities to reinforce lows because they do not pay attention to their behavior.
8. *Calling on lows less often.* Teachers call on highs more frequently than on lows.
9. *Differing interaction patterns of highs and lows.* Contact patterns between teachers and lows differ in elementary and secondary classes. Highs dominate public response opportunities in elementary classes, but highs and lows receive about the same number of private teacher contacts. Highs become more dominant in public settings in secondary classes, but lows receive more private teacher contacts.
10. *Seating lows farther from the teacher.* With random student grouping in classrooms, undesirable discrepancies in teacher behavior between highs and lows are less likely. This may be because lows sit next to "liked" students so that teachers are more likely to notice them and treat them as *individual* learners. Some pattern studies have found that lows tend to be placed farther from the teacher than highs (creating a physical barrier).
11. *Demanding less from lows.* This is a relevant variable according to several studies. It can be considered an extension of the more focused "giving-up" variable mentioned above. It includes such activities as giving lows easier tests (and letting students know it) or simply not asking a student to do academic work. Or if a low masters the elementary aspects of a unit, neglecting him or her until the elementary aspects of the next unit are dealt with. Teachers set different mastery levels for students. At times, however, demanding less may be appropriate if initial low demands are coupled with systematic efforts to improve performance. (24)

In terms of language acquisition, the higher the teacher's expectations for a child, the more quickly and efficiently that child will enhance his or her language skills. It is imperative, therefore, that teachers be aware of their communication to students. If student participation can increase language skills, then teachers who communicate more with high-expectation students may be inhibiting the language skill development of low-expectation students.

Summary

This section has examined several factors of the hidden curriculum: teacher communication style, modeling, feedback, and expectations. Teachers need to be cognizant of these factors — how they may be communicated to students and their effect on children's acquisition of language skills. When children are encouraged to communicate, their skills are enhanced. A later section of this book discusses several ways for teachers to provide opportunities for language interaction.

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Teachers need to understand how language is acquired if they are to improve their students' skilled use of language. Exactly how children learn language is still only partially understood; however, three major forces seem to affect their language acquisition — biological forces, a child's natural curiosity, and interaction with adults.

To make sounds, a child must possess the biological mechanisms as well as the muscular coordination to do so. Menyuk indicates that the structure of the newborn's vocal apparatus prevents making speech sounds (42). As the size and configuration of the vocal apparatus change, infants begin to make speech sounds.

In addition to biological forces, children's natural curiosity affects their language learning. Piaget indicates that this natural curiosity leads children to investigate the environment (47). Part of their environment is the language of their culture. Thus, children are curious about language and are eager to make it work for them.

Finally, the child's interpersonal environment affects language development. For example, Cazden found that when adults extend a child's utterances by asking questions, making comments, or stating new ideas, language development is positively affected (12). The more they interact with adults, the more quickly and efficiently children seem to learn complex language forms. For teachers, Cazden's research suggests that the more classroom interaction, the more children's language development will be enhanced.

Although we may not completely understand the language learning process, we do know that most children progress through the same general stages of language development. We also know that language development at all stages forms a coherent system, albeit a very different one from adult language. For example, when a child says *He goed* instead of *He went*, it is apparent that the child has learned the rule for forming the past tense of verbs such as *worked* and *played* and has applied the rule to all verbs.

Table I outlines the stages of language development (18). A close examination of this table indicates that in order to acquire language, children must learn the phonology (sounds), the syntax (structure), the semantics (meaning), and the social uses of language. The remainder of this section briefly examines each of these four elements.

Phonology

One of the child's first vocal noises is crying. Soon the infant chuckles and coos. Next the infant enters the babbling stage in which some vocalizations resemble sounds in the adult language. The process of mastering adult speech sounds requires much time and practice. In fact, although the basic speech sounds are well established by age four, they may not be mastered until age seven or eight (40).

The order in which children learn speech sounds may differ slightly from child to child, but the general pattern is outlined by Macauley:

> The simplest sounds for the child to produce are apparently those produced with the lips (p), (b), and (m) and those produced by putting the tongue against or slightly behind the back of the upper teeth (t), (d), and (n). It also seems to be the case that the easiest way for the child to make a short word longer is by repeating the same syllable. Thus words such as *mama, papa, dada,* and such are relatively easy for the young child to produce, and it is not surprising that they should form part of the child's early vocabulary. The first sounds in words such as *foot* (f), *thumb* (θ), *chair* (č), *juice* (ǰ), *lamb* (l), and *roof* (r), for example, are much more difficult for young children to produce and thus they are likely to learn these words later or else produce a version of the word in which an easier sound has been substituted for the difficult one. For example, one two-year-old girl said (bap) for *lamb* and (nam) for *thumb*. This is probably because it was easier for her to produce a syllable with one oral and one nasal consonant.
>
> The actual order in which children learn to use particular sounds may vary slightly but the general pattern is clear. Stop consonants produced in the front of the mouth (p), (b), (t), and (d) occur early, as do the corresponding nasal sounds (m) and (n). The stop consonants produced further back in the mouth (k) and (g) and the corresponding nasal (ŋ) (the final sound in *sing*) are learned later. The first vowel is likely to be one produced with the tongue fairly flat in the mouth (a) and the next two with the tongue raised towards the back of the mouth (u) and towards the front of the mouth (i). The (w), (y) (the first sound in *yes*), and (h) are also learned quite early. Slightly later come the first fricatives (f), (v), (s), and (z). The most difficult consonants are apparently (l), (r), (č) (the first sound in *chin*), (ǰ) (the first sound in *gem*), (š) (the first

TABLE I*

THE SEQUENCE OF EMERGING LANGUAGE BEHAVIORS

Birth to 6 months	*The infant period.* The child produces such sounds as grunts, cries, gasps, shrieks, chuckling, and cooing (at 4 months).
6 months to 9 months	*The babbling period.* The child produces units of utterances called babbling that differ from one situation to another. These units begin to be acoustically similar to adult utterances because the child sloughs off the irrelevant phonemes rather than acquiring new phonemes.
9 months	*The jargon period.* Stresses and intonation patterns in strings of utterance units clearly correspond to those of the adult. Some imitation of general language-like patterns can be identified. Specific morphemes cannot be distinguished easily by the listener.
9 months to 1 year	*The quiet period.* The decrease in vocalization during this period of development is interesting. Language habits continue to develop but changes are not immediately apparent to the observer. One reason for this period of relative quiet may be the discontinuity in language development between the previous stage and the next stages; a transition occurs from the use of jargon to the use of words as the adult knows them.
1 year to 2 years	*The holophrastic stage.* The child uses single words to indicate whole phrases. He can use base structure, but transformational rules to produce the surface structure have not been acquired. The single word is the start of the child's vocabulary. Preconventional "words" are considered words by the parent because a given sound pattern is used consistently in similar situations (for example, using "muk" for milk). These vocalizations sound like words and may be considered words by the prideful parents.

*From *Language, Learning, and Cognitive Processes*, by F. J. Di Vesta. Copyright © 1974 by Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc. Reprinted by permission of the publisher, Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., Monterey, Calif.

TABLE I — *Continued*

	The child understands much of what he is told. He demonstrates his comprehension by responding in a way that is meaningful to the adult — he may obey a command or point to an object. At the end of this period the child produces from 20 words (at about 18 months) to 200 words (at about 21 months).
2 years	*The spurt in word development.* Many conventional words appear in the child's vocabulary, which increases from 300 to 400 words at 24 to 27 months to 1000 words at 36 months. He produces two- and three-word utterances, phrases, and sentences in which the pivot-open structure is well established. A given word can be used with a number of intonations: specifically, declarative ("doll"); emphatic ("doll!"); and interrogative ("doll?").
3 years	*The sentence period.* At 36 to 39 months, the child can use 1000 words; he uses sentences containing grammatical features that anticipate the adult's use of language rules. He uses functionally complete sentences — that is, sentences that clearly designate an idea as in the sentence, "This one riding horse." — that are grammatically incomplete.
3 to 5 years	The child uses sentences of all types: nonunderstandable sentences, functionally complete but grammatically incomplete sentences, simple sentences, simple sentences with phrases, compound sentences, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences.
5 years to maturity	The individual's language system shows more frequent use of sentences with complex structure, increases in the variety of types of sentences, and increases in the length of sentences.

sound in *ship*), (ʒ) (the middle consonant in *measure*), (θ) (the first sound in *thumb*), and (ð) (the first sound in *them*), though not necessarily in that order.

In the early stages children do not make a systematic distinction between voiced consonants (e.g., (b, d, g, v, z) etc.) and voiceless consonants (e.g., (p, t, k, f, s) etc.). They will use either one apparently indifferently. Gradually they learn to make the distinction — at first at the beginning of words, then in the middle of words, and finally at the end of words. (40, pp. 15-16)

Even after children learn the individual sounds, they may have difficulty putting them together. They may omit certain sounds in words or replace one sound with another. This occurs because some combinations of sounds require fairly complex muscular movements, and young children may not have developed sufficient muscular flexibility to combine the sounds.

Syntax

Children begin speaking with one-word utterances. Then they use two-word sequences and gradually produce longer and more complex utterances. During the one-word utterance stage, children are primarily concerned with the presence and absence of things and people. At this stage they can distinguish people who perform actions (agents) from the actions themselves and from things that are acted upon (objects). They also are aware of the concept of place.

Around the age of eighteen months, children begin to combine words. The first combinations usually relate to the presence (*There baby*), absence (*No juice*), or recurrence (*More milk*) of a person or an object. Next, combinations involving people as agents (*Mommy eat*), places (*Sit chair*), and actions (*Read book*) appear. Finally, possession utterances (*Baby's coat*) and attribution utterances (*Baby sick*) emerge.

Although children at this stage are speaking only two-word utterances, they have an understanding of more complex structures but cannot say them in one single combination. Thus a child may say *Mommy eat* and then *Eat cake*, but will not produce *Mommy eat cake*. When the child begins to speak in three-word utterances, language development progresses rapidly.

Prior to the three-word stage, children omit morphemes — basic units of meaning consisting of one or more phonemes — that indicate plurality, possession, or tense. In addition they omit articles and auxiliary verbs. Their speech is labeled "telegraphic speech" because it is similar to a telegram — all unnecessary words are omitted, yet normal

word order is present.

Eventually children do add these omitted words and morphemes, and in a predictable order:

Grammatical Morpheme	*Examples* (Relevant portions italicized)
1. present-progressive verb ending	"Billy cry*ing*."
	"Mommy eat*ing*."
2. the prepositions "in" and "on"	"Sitting *on* potty."
3.	"Playing *in* sand."
4. plural endings	"Hide eye*s*."
	"Play block*s*."
5. past irregular verbs ("came," "fell," "broke," "sat," and "went," are used most frequently)	"Daddy *came* home."
	"Billy *went* to the potty."
6. possessives	"Mommy*'s* purse."
	"See Teddy*'s* eyes."
7. uncontractible copula	"What *is* this?"
	"Mommy *is* silly."
8. articles	"*The* baby is crying."
	"Teddy has *a* hat."
9. past-regular tense endings	"I lift*ed* the plate."
	"Billy carri*ed* it."
10. third-person-regular tense ending	"She carri*es* her teddy."
	"He pat*s* the doggie."
11 third-person-irregular endings	"Mom go*es* shopping."
	"He sit*s* down."
12. uncontractible auxiliary	"The baby *is* crying."
	"Mom *is* going away."
13. contractible copula	"What*'s* this?"
	"Mom*'s* silly."
14. contractible auxiliary	"The baby*'s* crying."
	"Mom*'s* going away."

(59 pp. 119-20)

Still to be learned are conjunctions (*and, but, because,* etc.), passive constructions (*The dog was run over by a car.*), relative clauses (*I like the toy that is in the toy box.*), reflexive pronouns (*He did it himself.*), and present perfect verb forms (*The dog has eaten the food.*). The time span required to learn these grammatical morphemes varies. Some children may not have mastered them until the age of six. Even when they have mastered them, however, children have not reached the adult level of usage. For example, up to the age of ten, children may have difficulty when the word order differs from the common subject-verb-object order.

Meaning

When one discusses meaning in relation to language acquisition, it is important to remember the communication axiom that meanings are in people not in words. Meanings of words are not necessarily the same for children as they are for adults. Remember also that children rarely indicate when they do not understand the meaning of a word. Macauley suggests two reasons for this: (1) since the redundancy in our language is high, we do not need to know the meaning of every word in an utterance in order to get the general drift, (2) children are less interested in language structure than adults are (40). Only when their language is at a fairly advanced stage (at age seven or eight) do children become interested in puns, tongue twisters, pig latin, and linguistic jokes. In terms of educational implications, teachers at all educational levels need to be sensitive to children's meaning and adapt language to a level which will cause children the least confusion.

Clark suggests that children learn meaning first by qualities such as size, shape, and texture (14). They learn abstract, less physical, meanings later. In addition, they learn general features before specific features — for example, the general feature of boy/girl before the more specific feature of brother/sister.

Taking a functional approach, Halliday outlines the functions of meaning and three phases of development (27). She argues that the product and the process of meaning should be examined simultaneously.

During phase one (9 to 16 months), children use language for six functions:

1. *Regulatory* — ask a person for something
2. *Instrumental* — communicate their needs to others
3. *Interactional* — relate to other people
4. *Personal* — express feelings
5. *Heuristic* — discover, ask questions
6. *Imaginative* — show curiosity about their environment.

In this phase children use each function separately, and their meanings may not be understood by everyone.

In phase two (16 to 24 months), additional functions emerge:

1. *Pragmatic* — elicit a response or action from others (invite others to action)
2. *Mathetic* — use language for learning (invite other's attention but no response).

In this phase the functions are combined to produce more complex meanings. For example, a child may say *Swing me.* Such a statement

combines the instrumental function (*I want*) and the regulatory function (*You do it*).

During this phase, children also learn that people can be both observers of an action and participants in an action simultaneously. Therefore by the end of phase two, children are saying things like *I see Tommy fall. He hurt.* In the beginning of phase two, children view themselves either as the observer or the participant: *Tommy fall.* or *I help Tommy.* In this phase, children learn to engage in dialogue. In order to do so, they must understand the concept of roles. Because children in phase one have no concept of role, they cannot engage in dialogue.

In phase three (24 months and older), children use two more functions:

1. *Interpersonal* — arises from use of language to act
2. *Ideational* — arises from use of language to learn.

During this phase meaning and environment interact. The environment influences children's choices of meaning which affect their perceptions of their environment. Children make choices about what to say based on variables relating to themselves, to those they are speaking with, and to the context of the speaking situation.

Social Usage

In addition to developing linguistic competence, children must develop communication competence. Essentially, this is what the child is beginning to develop in phase three of meaning development.

Communication competence involves four principal features:

1. *Repertoire of communication acts:* In order to be competent communicators, children need to be capable of performing a wide range of communication acts. As children grow in experience, they acquire a number of communication acts from which to choose.
2. *Choosing a communication act:* Children select from their repertoire of acts those they feel would be most appropriate for a given situation. In making this choice, relevant characteristics of the communication situation — people, topic, task, and setting — must be considered.
3. *Implementing a communication act:* After determining the act to use in a given communication situation, children must be willing and able to put the selected act into action.
4. *Evaluating the effectiveness of the communication act:* After implementing the selected communication act, children must evaluate it in relation to its appropriateness and effectiveness. As one grows in competence, one makes informed judgments about one's own communication. These judgments influence

the choices one makes and the implementation that occurs in sustaining the communication act and ultimately contribute to the repertoire of acts which provide the base for future communication encounters. (1)

As teachers, then, it is important to provide children experiences which expand their repertoire of speech communication acts, to provide children an opportunity to identify and sharpen the criteria they use in choosing acts, to enable children to experience themselves in dynamic interaction as they express their choices verbally and nonverbally, and to provide children opportunities to sharpen their critical awareness of self and others during interactions. A precaution is necessary. These four steps are not developed sequentially. Rather, all are operative in any given moment of communication.

To be competent communicators, children must be able to perform five different kinds of communication acts:

1. *Controlling*. These are acts in which the participants' dominant purpose is to control behavior. They include behaviors such as commanding, offering, suggesting, permitting, threatening, warning, prohibiting, contracting, refusing, bargaining, rejecting, acknowledging, justifying, persuading, and arguing.
2. *Feeling*. These are acts in which the participants' dominant purpose is to express feelings and attitudes as an effective response. They tend to be spontaneous and are manifested because of the satisfactions they carry for the participants. They include behaviors such as exclaiming, expressing a state or an attitude, taunting, commiserating, tale-telling, and blaming.
3. *Informing*. These are acts in which the participants' purpose is to offer or seek information. They include behaviors such as stating pieces of information, questioning, answering, justifying, naming, pointing out an object, demonstrating, explaining, and acknowledging.
4. *Ritualizing*. These are acts which serve primarily to maintain social relationships and to facilitate social interaction. They include greeting, taking leave, participating in verbal games (pat-a-cake), reciting, taking turns in conversations, participating in culturally appropriate speech modes, and demonstrating culturally appropriate amenities.
5. *Imagining*. These are acts which cast the participants in imaginary situations. They include creative behaviors such as role playing, fantasizing, speculating, dramatizing, and storytelling. (1)

These acts serve both initiating and responding purposes. A child can express feelings as well as respond to the feelings of others. In addition, because communication is complex, each communication situation includes multiple functions. A person may be sharing feelings in a role-play situation and engaging in the imagining act as well. Finally, these acts can be accomplished through nonverbal as

well as verbal means. A sad face can express the feeling of unhappiness without any spoken words.

Summary

This section has examined, albeit very briefly, the language acquisition of children. To function effectively in society, the child must learn the phonetical and syntactical structure of language, word meanings, and the social uses of language. The process of language acquisition is complex. Much remains to be learned if teachers are to help children acquire language efficiently and effectively.

HELPING CHILDREN ACQUIRE LANGUAGE SKILLS

To help children acquire language skills, it is important that teachers exhibit attitudes which foster their students' linguistic development. This section examines some of these attitudes and outlines several activities that teachers can use to enhance children's language acquisition.

Attitudes

First and foremost is a positive attitude toward teaching. Teaching brings many rewards and satisfactions, but it is a demanding, exhausting, and sometimes frustrating, job. It is hard to do well unless one enjoys doing it. When teachers enjoy teaching, this attitude shows in their classroom behavior.

Next, it is important that teachers deal with students as individuals not as groups or stereotypes. Each child needs to know that he or she is a person whose opinion is valued and whose feelings are respected. Practices such as grouping or labels such as *slow learner* should be used only to meet the needs of individual students and/or to think about ways to teach individuals better. In the final analysis, teachers are teaching Johnny and Susie, not Group A or slow learners. The way teachers talk about their students is an indication of how they think about them and how they relate to them.

Also, teachers need to create a positive classroom environment. Children learn more effectively when they do not feel threatened (4, 9). Teachers can create a positive classroom atmosphere by using six behaviors:

1. Be descriptive rather than evaluative. Be nonjudgmental. Rather than saying, "Don't slam the door," use more positive language such as "Shut the door quietly." Such subtle language can do

a great deal to create a positive, nonthreatening classroom atmosphere.

2. Rather than trying to control children, develop an attitude of problem orientation. In problem orientation, the teacher communicates a desire to work together *with* children.
3. Be honest and straightforward with children. When they feel deceived, they feel threatened.
4. Communicate your interest in children to them. Every child needs to feel important, respected, and worthwhile.
5. Avoid a superior attitude. Teachers can learn as much from their students as students learn from them.
6. Finally, teachers need a positive attitude toward communication and language development. (21)

If teachers view teaching and learning as a mutual communication process between their students and themselves, then they will accept and encourage student ideas and feelings, praise rather than criticize, listen to students, break the long-standing rule that teachers should do most of the talking, accept pupil mistakes as a valuable part of learning, and be authentic in their classrooms.

Activities

When designing activities to help children develop their language abilities, there are several principles for teachers to keep in mind:

1. Teachers need to listen to children. As Macauley suggests, probably one of the most important factors in a child's linguistic development is an interested listener (40).
2. Children will be more willing to talk when they are allowed to talk about their own experiences:

> It is as talkers, questioners, arguers, gossipers, chatterboxes, that our pupils do much of their most important learning. Their everyday talking voices are the most subtle and versatile means they possess for making sense of what they do and for making sense of others, including teachers. (40, p. 127)

3. Part of linguistic and communication competence is being a good listener. Thus, children do not need to be talking all the time. They need opportunities to practice their listening skills.

It is important that teachers not criticize their students' use of language. Burnes notes that "as soon as we begin to hamper the child's desire to express himself by criticism of that expression, we begin to destroy his ability to communicate at all" (10, p. 40). Hunter stresses that methods such as "rejecting comments, boring vocabulary assignments, copying papers over, looking up mispelled words, being told that someone else's work is much better than one's own" (33, p. 373)

discourage writing and speaking.

Based upon the writings of Basil Bernstein, Wood suggests an "indirect" method of language teaching for elementary school students. She believes that teachers can teach linguistic forms (such as "possessive") through games and exercises without labeling them as linguistic forms. (58) In addition, she suggests four areas in which oral language programs in elementary schools can be improved:

1. We must review all pertinent research and theory in language development and behavior for children.
2. We must plan our language objectives so that they are specific and so that they complement the developmental stages of grammatical acquisition.
3. Our published texts (methods texts, readers, curriculum guides) must reflect these linguistic objectives in their language improvement exercises.
4. Our classroom activities in speech and language improvement must reflect language code objectives. (58, p. 192)

Classroom activities should be structured so that children may develop their language in real-world communication contexts. One way to do this is to bring in photographs and have children orally make up stories about what is happening in them, or simply to have children orally describe what is happening. Also, children can role play the events in the photographs.

In addition to role playing, teachers can use creative dramatics improvisational techniques and instructional games to enhance discovery learning. When teaching history, for example, teachers can ask students to role play historical events such as the signing of the Declaration of Independence or the first Thanksgiving. Such teaching strategies provide opportunities for children to increase their awareness of how language works as well as to learn new applications.

Storytelling is another activity which can help children increase their language skills. They can make up their own stories or tell a familiar story in their own words. This technique provides an opportunity for children to extend their use of language.

Children should be encouraged to play with language. Creating nonsense rhymes and words or writing puns can increase their knowledge of language. Discussing the "rules" of pig latin and comparing them to the "rules" of English can also be interesting as well as informative to children.

As children work on projects or experiments, teachers can help them develop their language by commenting on or asking questions about what is happening as well as on what they are doing ("Look how those two pieces fit together. See how one piece juts out and the other curves in so they can meet? or "Why do you think . . . ?").

Children do not learn language only from adults; they learn much of their language skill from other children (1). Allowing children to work together or discuss issues in small groups or dyads can facilitate trying out new communication acts.

Summary

The previous suggestions in no way exhaust the possible activities for helping children in their language acquisition. They are meant only to stimulate the teacher's own thinking. Certainly many teachers already use these suggestions and many others. The important thing to remember is that the more activities teachers provide, the better the opportunity for children to increase their skilled use of language.

HELPING OLDER STUDENTS DEVELOP SKILLED USE OF LANGUAGE

Teachers of older students are presented with a special challenge. They can help students develop the ability to use language which is clear and appropriate for the types of situations they are likely to encounter throughout their lives. Watching students develop these skills can be an exciting process.

To encourage teachers to develop these skills in their students, Hopper expands the linguistic idea of competence to include the function of language. He maintains that "much of grammar has already been learned by the child long before he enters school, and that development just prior to entering kindergarten at least is focusing upon learning to apply linguistic knowledge appropriately to situations" (31, p. 34). He believes that "educational practices could be most supportive of this aspect of development if less emphasis were placed upon forcing children to speak sentences in certain grammatical *forms* . . . and more emphasis were placed upon educating children to use their language to perform certain *functions*" (p. 34). This idea is especially important, Hopper notes, for teachers of black students in inner-city schools. Instead of focusing attention on getting these students to speak "acceptable standard English," teachers could teach function rather than grammar. According to Hopper, this strategy may be a faster route for developing "acceptable" speaking patterns then emphasizing grammatical rules.

Hopper and Wrather list five functions of communication — persuading, informing, expressing feelings, ritualizing, and imagining (32). In general, students are able to use language to perform these functions, but teachers can help them perform these functions *more effectively*. Teacher-developed in-class exercises can encourage students

to perform these functions in creative ways. Many of the exercises discussed in the preceding section can be adapted for older students. The important thing to remember is to focus on the effective use of these functions, not on what is "correct" or "incorrect." For example, discuss with the class what type of language works for students in particular situations and why it might not work in other situations. See if students can generate some rules for usage in particular situations based upon their observations of what is actually said in these situations. This will increase students' awareness of the variety of linguistic expression and the notion of situational appropriateness.

The Debate over Nonstandard Speech

Standard American English, popularly viewed as "good English," is the language used by educated speakers and writers. Many authors have proposed language programs for students who do not speak standard English. For example, Holt describes an "Ethno-Linguistic Approach" developed in cooperation with black inner-city parents, teachers, and children in Chicago (30). The course is designed to incorporate Black Culture as a basis for speech-language learning.

Scholars disagree, however, on the advisability of providing such courses. Colquit, for example, maintains that "few schools recognize the legitimacy of the student's right to his own language" (15, p. 17). He discusses three instructional models which he feels "deny the legitimacy of minority dialects": (1) the melting pot model "implies that Blacks and other minorities have nothing to contribute to the nation, and that they must give up their identity to be assimilated" (pp. 17-18); (2) the language deficit model "equates cultural difference with inferiority, and its advocates work for the elimination of Black dialect" (p. 18); and (3) "the programmed invisibility of minorities" by exclusion and cultural oppression (p. 18). Colquit advocates the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) Multi-Ethnic Model. According to Colquit:

> The underlying assumption [of this model] is that all ethnic groups can be enriched by an understanding of each other's language and background. This model recognizes the uniqueness of individuals and divergent groups as a human right and a basic need of all ethnic groups; it rejects the language deficit model and recognizes Black dialect as a different means of communication. (15, p. 19)

Sayer argues that Colquit "confuses culture with language" (53, p: 45) and that language instruction models are not designed to strip minorities of their identity. According to Sayer, "contemporary lan-

guage instruction is designed to improve the student's social and professional acceptability and adaptability" (p. 46). Kochman refutes this argument, maintaining that

> So long as the scholastics can uncontestedly maintain that their educational policies are really intended to "protect" the nonstandards of society against discrimination, they will be able to divert attention away from the fact that their policies are really designed to preserve their own interests and those of the present establishment. (34, p. 40)

Thus, he does not advocate teaching oral performance in standard English to speakers of nonstandard dialects "because the 'social security' that the scholastics presume a minority person will have gained from this acquisition is . . . nonexistent" (34, p. 44).

In an article on valuing diversity in language, Goodman sums up this controversy:

> Educators for generations have assumed that getting a pupil to speak more "properly" automatically made him more effective. The language of low-status groups has been characterized as sloppy, incomplete, ineffective, and inadequate. The confusion between language difference and language deficiency permeates texts, tests, and curricula in wide use today. (25, p. 124)

Teachers need to remember that language that is different is not language that is deficient.

Harpole notes that there seems to be an "increasing acceptance of an 'adaptive' standard of correctness" (28, p. 226). One of the difficulties facing students is that while many educators verbalize acceptance of "adaptive standards," their classroom behavior does not reflect this acceptance. Harpole cites several research studies which "seem to indicate that, although a child may have the ability to learn and may not be hindered in so doing by his dialect, he may not achieve academically because of negative teacher attitudes associated with his nonstandard speech patterns" (pp. 227-28). Williams discovered that teachers' evaluations of a speaker's ethnicity and dialect correlated with their expectations of the child's academic performance (28, 56). Thus, negative teacher attitudes may be influencing the academic performance of these children even if teachers are not purposefully attempting to influence their dialect.

It is important for teachers to remember that nonstandard English has a system of rules and, although it is different from standard English, it is not necessarily an inferior means of communication (35). Raspberry compares nonstandard English to trading stamps:

> The reason we want . . . children to learn standard is that

> nonstandard is a good deal less negotiable — just as trading stamps are less negotiable than cash.
>
> But that doesn't mean that trading stamps are *bad* . . . .
>
> What linguists want to do is to give . . . children facility with standard English without forcing them to forget their native nonstandard — to give them cash without confiscating their trading stamps. The nonstandard . . . may be *the* negotiable language back home. (49, p. 431)

One way to encourage this skill is to point out the differences between students' speech and standard English without criticizing students' speech. As mentioned earlier in this publication, teachers' feedback to students should be specified, be well-timed, and focus on behavior rather than on the individual. J. L. Dillard, an authority on Black English, notes:

> In dealing with speakers of Black English, it is . . . frequently useful to call attention to the students' language and to point out its differences from Standard English. Surprisingly few of the students who have been exposed to such practices have shown any resentment, in our experience. (It is presupposed, of course, that the teacher will not call Black English "bad" or "incorrect," and that he will not attribute it to any physical or genetic characteristics.) A healthy expression of interest on the part of the teacher — supposing that the interest is genuine — is a very good device for establishing rapport with the students and for making them "language conscious." (17, p. 292)

CONCLUSION

This book has presented a great deal of information on language and on ways for teachers to help students develop their skilled use of language. It is hoped that teachers will explore these ideas further by reading some of the materials listed in the bibliography. Language is a fascinating area of study, and the development of students' ability to use language effectively is a special responsibility of all teachers. Students of all ages should be encouraged to express themselves.

According to Harpole, "To break the cycle of the self-fulfilling prophecy operating in the classroom, changes in teacher training programs are recommended to increase teacher awareness of varying attitudes and communication codes operating in different cultures" (28, p. 228). The results of research on the perceptions of dialect characteristics, among other issues, should be incorporated into teacher training programs because, in many cases, teachers are operating with cultural and linguistic codes different from those of their students (28, p. 228). Teachers need to be careful to avoid criticizing their

students' use of language because, as Raspberry notes, "the way we speak in such an integral part of who we are that to deprecate our speech is to deprecate us" (49, p. 431). Successful teachers, then, will do all they can to increase students' confidence in themselves. One way to do this is to increase their confidence in their skilled use of language.

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[1]Standard English, popularly known as "good English," is the form of the language used in schools, churches, and in the conduct of the affairs that officially concern the whole community, such as government (8, p. 48).
[2]Nonstandard English is popularly called "bad English." The native speaker of standard English does not trouble to learn nonstandard English, but many speakers of nonstandard English try to learn standard English (8, p. 48).
[3]For a complete discussion of the history of grammar, see, for example, Bloomfield (8), Francis (19), or Pyles (48).
[4]Received standard is the most formal form of standard English.
[5]Popular usage is what people commonly say in informal conversations.
[6]This conclusion points to a problem when dealing with spoken language in written form. The *Linguistic Atlas* records pronunciations. The textbooks surveyed by Malmstrom advised students about both written and spoken language. They make no provision for the student who says [set dawn] but writes *Sit down.*
[7]Expanding usage indicates that a particular pronunciation or word is common in one area of the country and is becoming common in other areas also.
[8]Standard usage is the form of the language used in schools, churches, and government (8, p. 48).

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